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### Psychological Trauma of War in Wilfred Owens's strange Meeting

**Abstract:** This paper focuses on the psychological trauma of the soldiers of the First World War and the brave efforts of the soldiers to overcome the pain and injury inflicted upon them. War is a construct to a great extent. Power and wealth leads to wars. War shook the foundations of the western world, and had enduring impacts on every aspect of human life. War produced an outpouring of literature. Much celebrated war-poets took birth from the outbreak of war and its aftermath. In addition the war brought a variety of responses from writers especially poets who saw action. Poets like Wilfred Owen not only caught the compassion of war but also addressed himself to larger moral perplexities raised by the war and were killed in action.

**Keywords:** Psychological trauma, war, futility, distress, death

The First World War studies show the social and cultural history of the war. Millions of people were made homeless and many millions were forced to flee their homeland for fear of life. Fear, sorrow and grief were the stifling emotions of the time. The conditions of the women were much horrible. They were left with no hope as the male members of the family were forced to serve in battlefields. Most of these men were either killed or fatally wounded.

Under this condition women were admitted to industry under strict regulations, including the fact that they did not actually replace the men but were allowed to perform only certain tasks. Women were paid about half of what men earned. Social life changed.

People sacrificed their lives and families and were torn apart due to war. Britain adapted to the challenge of vast number of World War I soldiers who returned from battlefields permanently disabled. Most disabled men could not find work unless it was in sheltered employment set up especially for them. A school for war- disabled taxi drivers was set up in London. A network of special villages was built for ex-servicemen and their families.

War destroyed and caused an unprecedented loss of labour. People suffered utter poverty and hopelessness. More pathetic was the condition of the disabled ex-servicemen. The Psychological trauma of the people was more complex. The soldiers underwent severe psychic stress induces by the war. Shell shock and combat stress were to name a few. Shell Shock is initially concept appeared in the British Medical Journal which focused the attention received on the issues of traumatic illness. The term got wider popularity with the commencement of war. The emergence of such terms throw light on the hitherto neglected aspects that war has caused on individual psyche.

The intense psychological stress experienced by the individual is referred to as trauma. The experience can be deeply disturbing and depressing. Such experience can even threaten the life and integrity of individual. It is detrimental and has lasting and untoward impact on people's lives. War adversely affects combatants and non-combatants both physically and emotionally. The terror and horror spread by the violence of war disrupts the lives and severs relationship and families leaving individuals and society emotionally distressed. The era of world war witnessed paradigm shift in the literature and art of the European world. Its waves echoed all over the globe. The literature of the age reflected the

changes in the lives and attitude of people, turbulent shifts the society has gone through and so on. The literary figures of the age felt the need of the hour and voiced out the flaws they saw in their everyday life. Their writings became an act of protest in a dreadful time in the world history.

Strange Meeting is a dramatic poem unlike Wilfred Owen's other works. The setting of the poem is in a hell like place where two soldiers meet, the first having killed by the second soldier ends up in reconciliation. The poem deals with the atrocities of World War I. The dialogues of the soldiers are one of the most poignant in modern war poetry. The poem explores the impact of war on soldiers and their psychological effect it has on them. As the title of the poem suggests the meeting of the soldiers is strange –it is in an imaginary place, between the killer and the killed.

Later studies revealed that the combatants and post combatants of war lived in a condition where they are permanently altered both physically and mentally. Wilfred Owen himself was victim of such a trauma. He became insensitive to the death of fellow fighter. As a soldier he led his men and as a poet he recorded the pity of war through his poetry. Owen depicts the inhumanity of man towards his fellow beings in an ironic manner. He disregarded the gentle poetry which painted a different picture of the war. Through depicting the helplessness and fear,

Owen transfers a sense of pity in his readers- 'the pity of war'. The poem with its form and meter brings out the horrific war to the forefront.

Owen introduces a sense of the hard history by the images of granite and the titanic wars.

"Through granites which titanic wars had groined" (line3).

The speaker of the poem wakes up to another world where he comes across many fellow combatants. They were experiencing the same horrific situation and they are dead or stuck in

their minds. By the end of the stanza the reader get a glimpse of the ghostly sur-real hell like world. In the other world both soldiers are free of animosity and hatred. They both become friends and are transported to a state of tranquility. Such a rendezvous could have never happened before their death. They both would be enemies there. The poet draws our attention to the cruel impact of the senseless war. By the mentioning of the term “groaning” speaker reflects the traumatic sufferings that the soldiers have endured during the war. The poem is replete with such images that make us realize the stark truths of war.

“Yet no blood reached there from the upper

Ground,

And no guns thumprd, or down the flues made

Moan.” (Lines 12-13)

The soldiers are made to act like robots devoid of emotions. Only then they can be at their happiest. The atrocities of war and struggle they have undergone made them machines and t are at their happiest, without feelings. Their feet neither get sore on the stones. Ironically it is stated that the soldiers are happy men. After death soldiers realized their agony and plight and both the slain and slayer are now friends. By the middle of the poem the dead man sums up the main theme of the poem and that of Owens’s philosophy by saying

“The Pity of War, the pity war

Distilled” (line26)

At last the dead soldier shows us the concluding moment of his life.

..... You jabbed and killed

..... But my hands were loath

And cold. (Line 42-43)

These lines sums up the unending struggles and sufferings of the innocent victims of war.

Owen through his own personal experience and through the lives of the innocent soldiers on the war front truthfully portrays the feelings of the humans their emotions and the realities of the ruthless war .Owen himself was a first hand victim of physical and psychological trauma of war. His picturisation of the brutality of war through such phrases as ;thousand fears', 'distressful hands' is so chilling that it needs no elaboration.

Owen has succeeded in portraying the reality of war, the plight of the soldiers involved in the war, the impact of the war and about the neglected men destined to fight in the combat. The poet's own experience in the war as a soldier revealed the psychological trauma of World War I. Owens's meticulous use of phrase and the diction to describe the pitiless war is unparalleled. He also throws light on the sacrifice and renunciation of the soldiers that remains unnoticed.

Owens poems are real and living record of wars; though he had never lived to see most of them published. He was present in the war, experienced its brutalities in the first hand and witnessed the murder of his fellow soldiers. His exceptional genius in using the literary skills to create such verses on war and serve in the war at the same time period is extraordinary. Owens's poem is a standing testimony for the generations who have never known or exposed to the severities of war. Unlike other war poets what stands out about Owen is that he did not write from outside the war field, he wrote from the war field, amidst guns and death.

## References

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